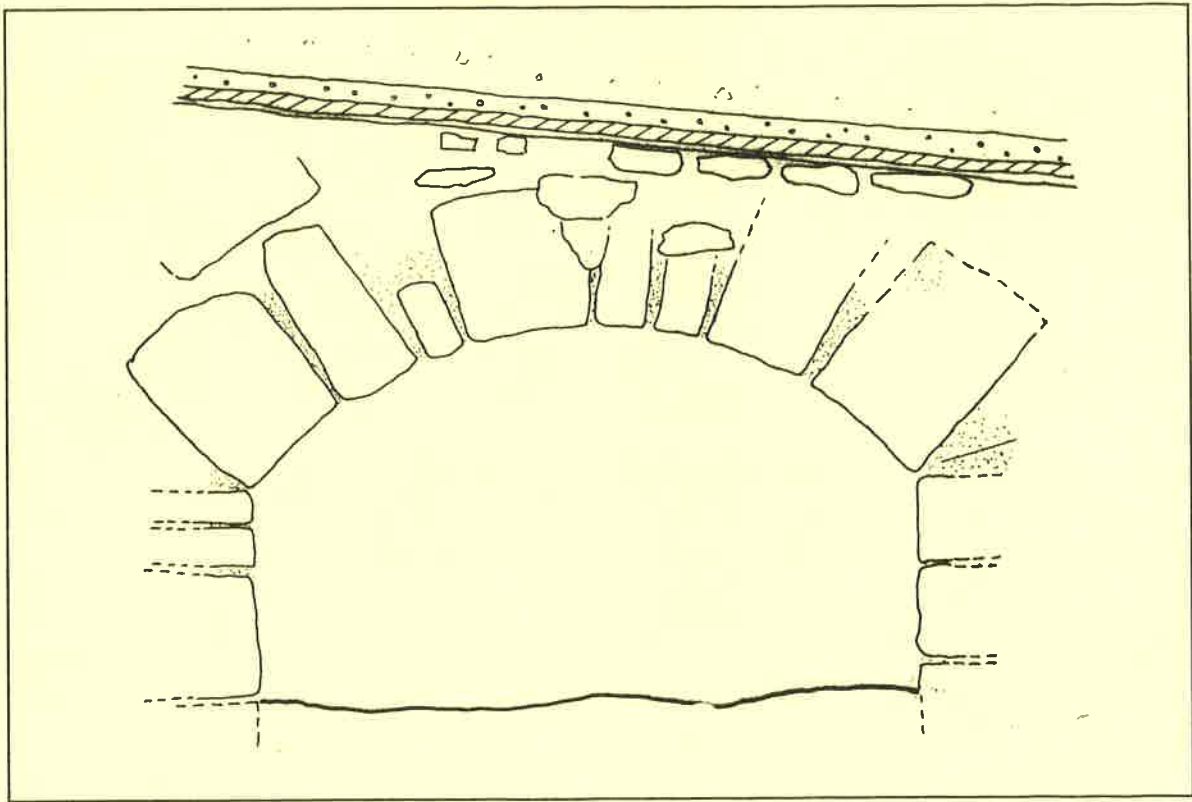


Oxfordshire County Council

STONE VAULT
WEST OXFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE
OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING DURING REDEVELOPMENT



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

March 2000

Oxfordshire County Council

STONE VAULT
WEST OXFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE
OXFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING DURING REDEVELOPMENT

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

March 2000

WEST OXFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE RECORDING OF STONE VAULT

CONTENTS

Summary

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Background
- 1.2 Aims and Objectives
- 1.3 Methodology

2 RESULTS

FIGURE 1 Elevation and Plan of vault

PLATE 1 Interior of west half of vault

WEST OXFORD COMMUNITY CENTRE RECORDING OF STONE VAULT

Summary

A stone vault which was disturbed during building works was recorded prior to its partial preservation in-situ. Although a detailed survey of the interior of the vault was not possible it strongly appeared that it was a bridge over which a road or track formerly passed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Oxford City Council to undertake a programme of archaeological recording at the site of the construction of the West Oxford Community Centre on the north side of the Botley Road opposite St Frideswides Church.

1.1.2 The work results from the truncation and partial uncovering of a buried stone vault during the construction of the foundations for the community centre. Historic maps had not suggested the presence of any feature in this area or of a high archaeological potential. The work had not therefore been preceded by an archaeological evaluation or undertaken subject to an archaeological watching brief.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

1.2.1 The principal aim of the project was to record the structure as far as possible within the limited scope of the project. The second main aim was to determine whether the feature was the remains of a bridge, a culvert or another vaulted feature.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Photographs (black and white prints and colour slides) were taken of the vault together with a measured section through the feature and further descriptive notes. Several samples were also taken to assist in dating the feature. The site work was undertaken on 21 December 1999.

1.3.2 Due to the working conditions and the limited nature of the recording required it was not possible to enter the feature or closely inspect the interior of the vault. It should be noted that the elevation/section included within this report (Figure 1) is customised so that the relatively low floor level shown is that

which was within the body of the vault rather than the higher level at the exposed opening.

- 1.3.3 The photographic negatives and the rest of the site archive will be deposited with the Oxfordshire County Council archives.

2 RESULTS

- 2.1.1 The vault was orientated roughly east-west and was disturbed by the formation of the west wall of the new community centre which cut through the vault to the east of its centre point. The wall cut through the vault dividing it into three sections: a small section to the east which was barely visible, a central section which had been largely removed and a larger section to the west which was stepped-back from the foundation and consequently more visible. Due to the rise of the ground towards the foundation it was not possible to enter either side of the surviving vault or to closely inspect the interior to confirm whether the two visible ends form the extent of the feature.
- 2.1.2 Assuming that the two visible ends were the extent of the vault the interior would have been 4.23 m (14') long and 1.25 m (4' 2") wide. Two stone dwarf walls c.40 cm above the lowest existing floor level supported a stone segmental arch the highest point of which was c.70 (2' 3") cm above the same floor inside the vault.
- 2.1.3 The vault was well-built largely being constructed of dressed, wedge-shaped sandstone blocks although some non-dressed stone was also used. The sizes of the blocks varied considerably in size but one of the larger ones was 35 cm (1' 2") wide by 40 (1' 4") cm deep by 70 cm (2' 4") long. The stone was bonded with a soft, sandy ochre-coloured mortar.
- 2.1.4 As referred to above it was not possible to enter either side of the vault to closely inspect the structure but it was possible to look into the west half to see that the enclosed space terminated sharply with a near vertical earth mound at right angles to the spine of the vault. The regularity of the end of this space suggested that this was the western extent of the feature, rather than representing the collapse of a formerly longer vault. This impression was further strengthened by the larger, more regular stone blocks at the west end which would have formed the dressed stone voussoirs at the west end of the arch. It was not possible to even visually inspect the east half due to the proximity of the foundation to the edge of the arch but it was possible to insert a tape and roughly measure what appeared to be the depth of the enclosed space.
- 2.1.5 The area above the main stones of the vault was infilled with smaller stones and above this were three relatively thin bands on a slight slope and c.35 cm above the top of the arch. The lowest band was a dark ash band c. 1 cm deep immediately above the mortar used to bond the stones of the vault. Above this was a dark grey band, c.4 cm deep, formed with small stones. Above this was an ochre-coloured stoney band which was beneath a stone infill c.45 cm deep

which formed the existing ground surface. The three bands were contemporary with the stone arch and apparently formed part of a made tarmacadam surface (or other road surface) passing over the arch.

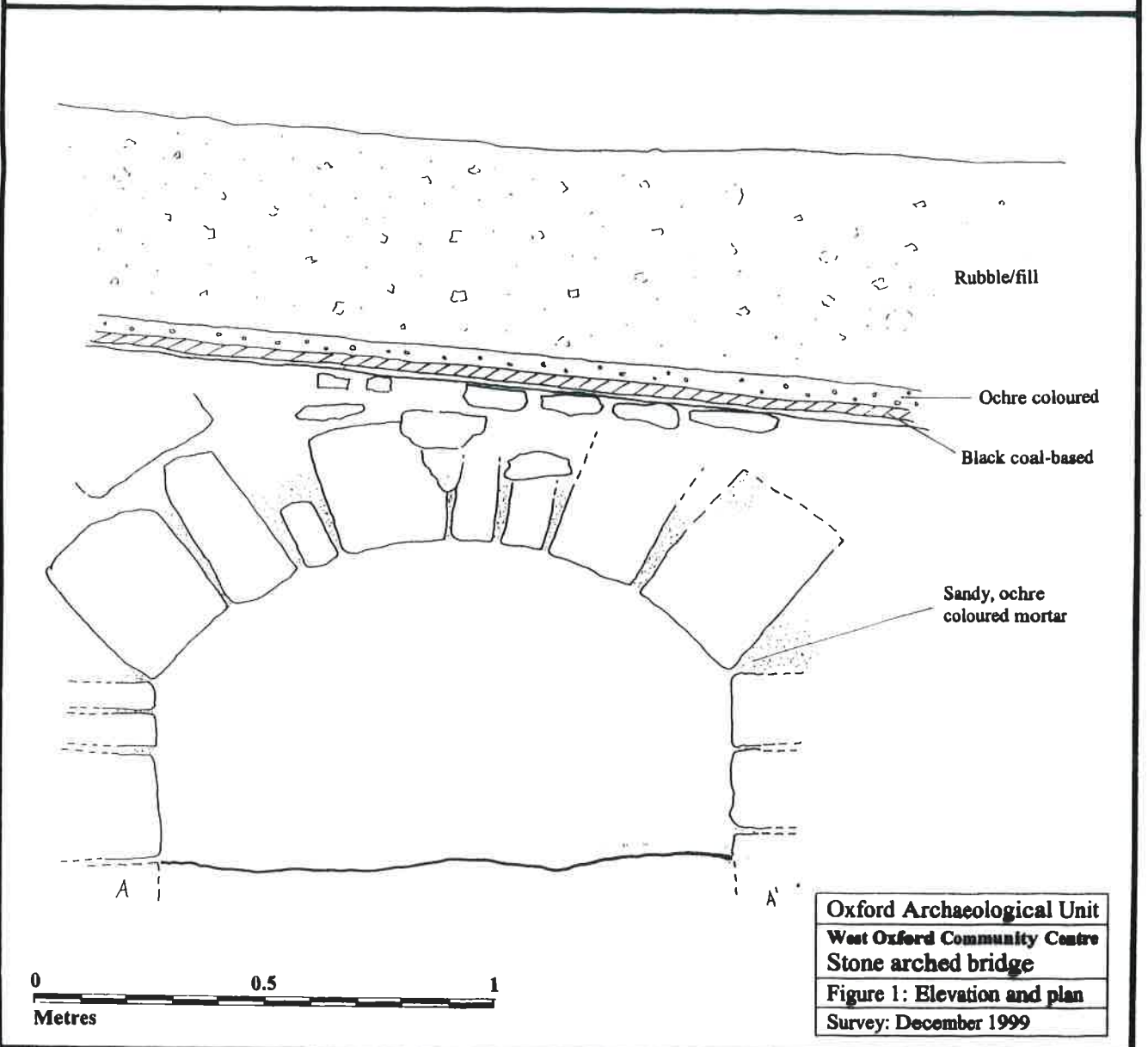
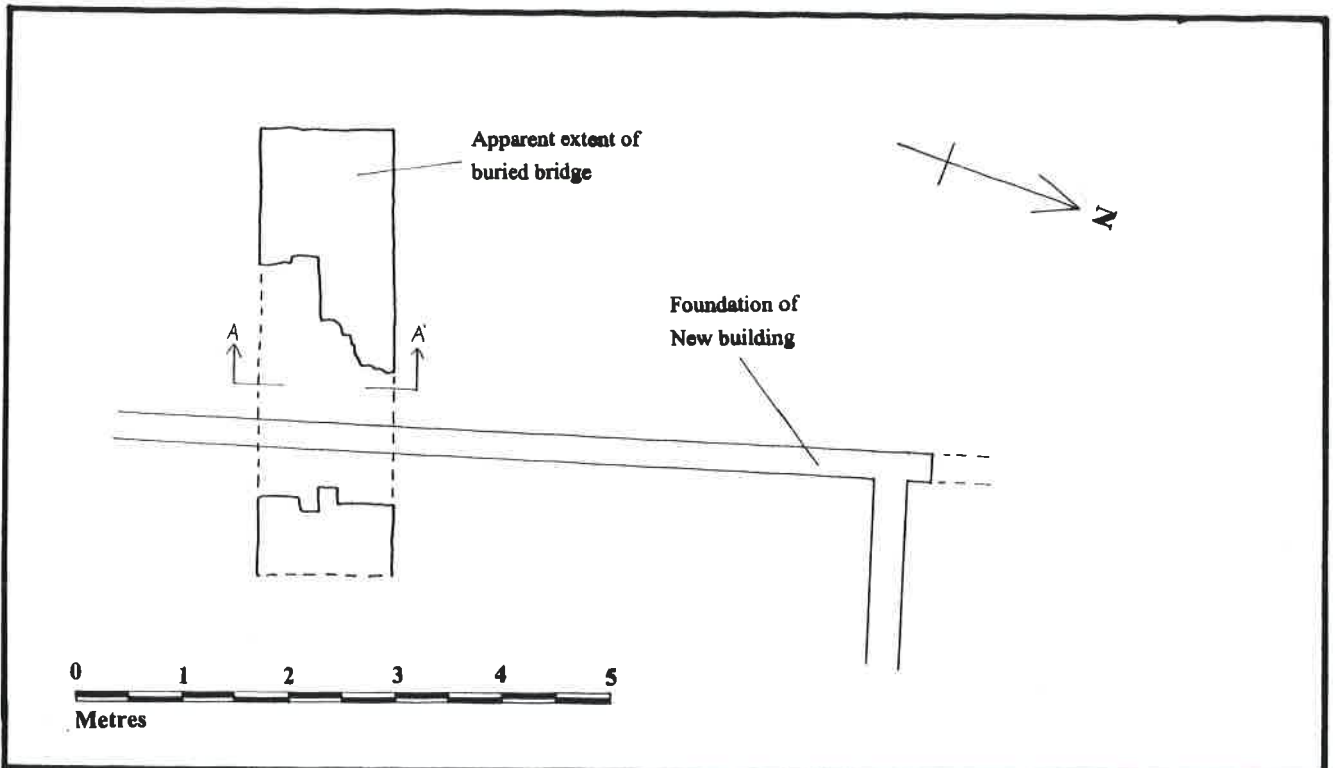
- 2.1.6 The rubble above the arch and beneath the tarmacadam surface contained fragments of hard red bricks which appeared to be probably no older than of eighteenth century date.

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Despite the lack of documentary evidence it would appear from the relatively limited examination possible that the vaulted feature was a bridge rather than a small section of a longer culvert or any other possible feature. This is based largely on the apparent termination of the vault at its west end and what appears to be a tarmacadam surface passing over the vault suggesting that this was a road or track passing over a small culverted stream or drain. It is surprising that a bridge, or a road passing over it, does not appear to be indicated on any of the main cartographic sources but further documentary research in the future may uncover reference to it.

Jonathan Gill
Oxford Archaeological Unit
March 2000

Oaudata 1/Server 1/personal/jong/reports/oxwocc



Oxford Archaeological Unit
 West Oxford Community Centre
 Stone arched bridge
 Figure 1: Elevation and plan
 Survey: December 1999



Plate 1: Interior of west half of vault



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES

Tel: 01865 263800 Fax: 01865 793496
email: postmaster@oau-oxford.demon.co.uk



Director and Chief Executive: David Jennings B.A., M.I.F.A. Oxford Archaeological Unit Limited.
Private Limited Company Number: 1618597 Registered Charity Number: 285627.
Registered Office: Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES